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SUBJECT: MIDDLE EAST - UNSC INSTRUCTIONS FOR MARCH 25
CONSULTATIONS

¶1. (SBU) Mission is instructed to draw from the points in paragraph 2 below in discussing events in the Middle East during the consultations to be held Tuesday morning, March 25 in the UN Security Council.

¶2. (U) Begin points:

The United States continues to work to support progress towards an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement before the end of 2008. Vice President Cheney and Secretary Rice each visited the region earlier this month to encourage progress in negotiations and on the ground. Secretary Rice will return to the region later this week to continue her discussions with the parties.

When we last met, violence was escalating in Gaza and southern Israel. Subsequently, on March 6, a terrorist gunman opened fire at the Mercaz Harav yeshiva in Jerusalem, killing eight young Israeli students and wounding eleven others. We strongly condemn this vicious attack against innocent civilians. In the wake of this tragedy, the Government of Israel courageously reaffirmed its commitment to negotiations. Israeli and Palestinian leaders continue to meet to work towards the shared goal of a permanent status agreement, and firm regional and international support remains crucial.

With that in mind, I'd like to make six points.

First is the need to achieve progress on the ground in order to create an atmosphere supportive of the negotiating process and to reassure Israelis and Palestinians alike of the seriousness of this process. General Fraser, who leads the U.S. effort to monitor progress on Roadmap implementation, has just returned from the region where he convened a trilateral meeting with the parties to assess progress and discuss next steps to fulfill the parties' commitments under the Roadmap. The General had a frank and positive exchange with the parties and is working with them to promote progress in this area.

Secretary Rice will use her next round of meetings with

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Israeli and Palestinian leaders later this week to further encourage progress.

Second is the critical importance of support from the international community to ensure that Palestinian humanitarian needs are being met and that nations are following through on their pledges from the Paris Donor Conference. These efforts will help President Abbas and PM Fayyad build the institutional capacity and develop the economy that will serve as the foundation for a

Palestinian state. For our part, the United States continues to provide basic humanitarian assistance to Palestinians living in Gaza via ongoing USAID programs and annual contributions to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The U.S. is the largest bilateral donor to UNRWA. In FY 2007, we contributed over \$154 million to UNRWA and we have, to date, pledged \$148 million in 2008. Our contributions to UNRWA support its provision of basic and vocational education, primary health care, and relief and social services to over 4.4 million registered Palestinian refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, as well as its provision of emergency food, health, jobs creation, and other relief services to Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza.

We are also moving forward with assistance programs utilizing the \$545 million pledge for assistance to the PA that Secretary Rice announced in Paris last December. Most recently, on March 19, we signed a cash transfer agreement with PM Fayyad, providing \$150 million in budgetary support to the Palestinian Authority. Much more is needed and we encourage Paris Conference participants to urgently provide the assistance they have pledged. We look forward to reviewing progress in this area at the upcoming meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee. We welcome Tony Blair's continuing leadership role in this area, including his involvement in planning the May 21-23 Bethlehem Private Sector Investment Conference. We also support Germany's proposed meeting later this spring to focus donor support on building the capacity of the Palestinian justice sector.

Third, turning to Lebanon, in addition to noting the pro-active engagement of the international community, I would also like to thank the Secretariat for the efforts underway to rapidly facilitate the work of the Special Tribunal. The United States welcomed the Secretary General's announcement on February 13 regarding full funding for the start-up costs and first year of operations of the Tribunal. The United States has already pledged \$14 million to the Tribunal and expects to contribute more over the course of its lifetime. I urge all Council members to generously support the Tribunal as a clear signal that the international community backs the effort of the Lebanese people to end the era of impunity for political assassinations in their country. We look forward to hearing more about the Tribunal during the discussion scheduled for Thursday.

Fourth, the U.S. remains deeply concerned about illegal arms transfers across the Syrian-Lebanese border, and in particular claims by Hizballah that it has replenished its military capacity since the 2006 war. We fully support the Secretary General's call for a process to disarm all militias in Lebanon in accordance with resolution 1559 and the Ta'if Accords. In accordance with resolutions of this Council, Hizballah must disarm, and it must do so now.

Fifth, the United States deplores Hizballah's continual refusal to provide any information about the two abducted Israeli soldiers, Eldad Regev and Ehud Goldwasser. We are appalled that Hizballah is placing conditions for their release that are outside the scope of 1701. We reiterate our call on Hizballah to immediately and unconditionally release them.

Finally, I would like to reiterate our concern that it has not yet been possible for the Lebanese to hold a presidential election. Although the Lebanese agree on a candidate, Syria and its allies within Lebanon are using other preconditions to perpetuate the political stalemate. However, until a new president takes office, the United States has full confidence in, and fully supports, the legitimate Lebanese Government in managing the affairs of the state and the Lebanese Armed Forces in continuing to provide security.

RICE